

This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes environmental consequences of the proposed Burnt Hollow Management Plan and alternative management programs. The EA will also identify appropriate measures to mitigate environmental effects, and document the decision-making process. Some of the proposed actions require development of detailed project plans prior to their implementation. Additional site-specific environmental analyses will be prepared for these project plans prior to implementation in order to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

## **CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION**

In a land exchange completed in March 2002 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Buffalo Field Office (BFO) acquired 9,236 acres of land. The acquired lands are contiguous to 9,180 acres of previously inaccessible BLM and State of Wyoming lands, totaling about 18,416 acres of public land, in one accessible block (Figure 1.1). This block is located in Campbell County, north of Gillette. Wyoming Highway 59 borders the property on the west and the Cow Creek County Road borders the north end of the property. The area is being termed the Burnt Hollow Management Area (BHMA).

The BHMA boundary as drawn in Figure 1.1 includes private and state lands; this management plan does not apply to non BLM managed lands. A second land exchange, to obtain approximately 560 acres of private property within the boundary, is in progress. The property proposed for acquisition is included in this management plan; this management plan will also apply to any future properties acquired by BLM within or adjacent to the BHMA.

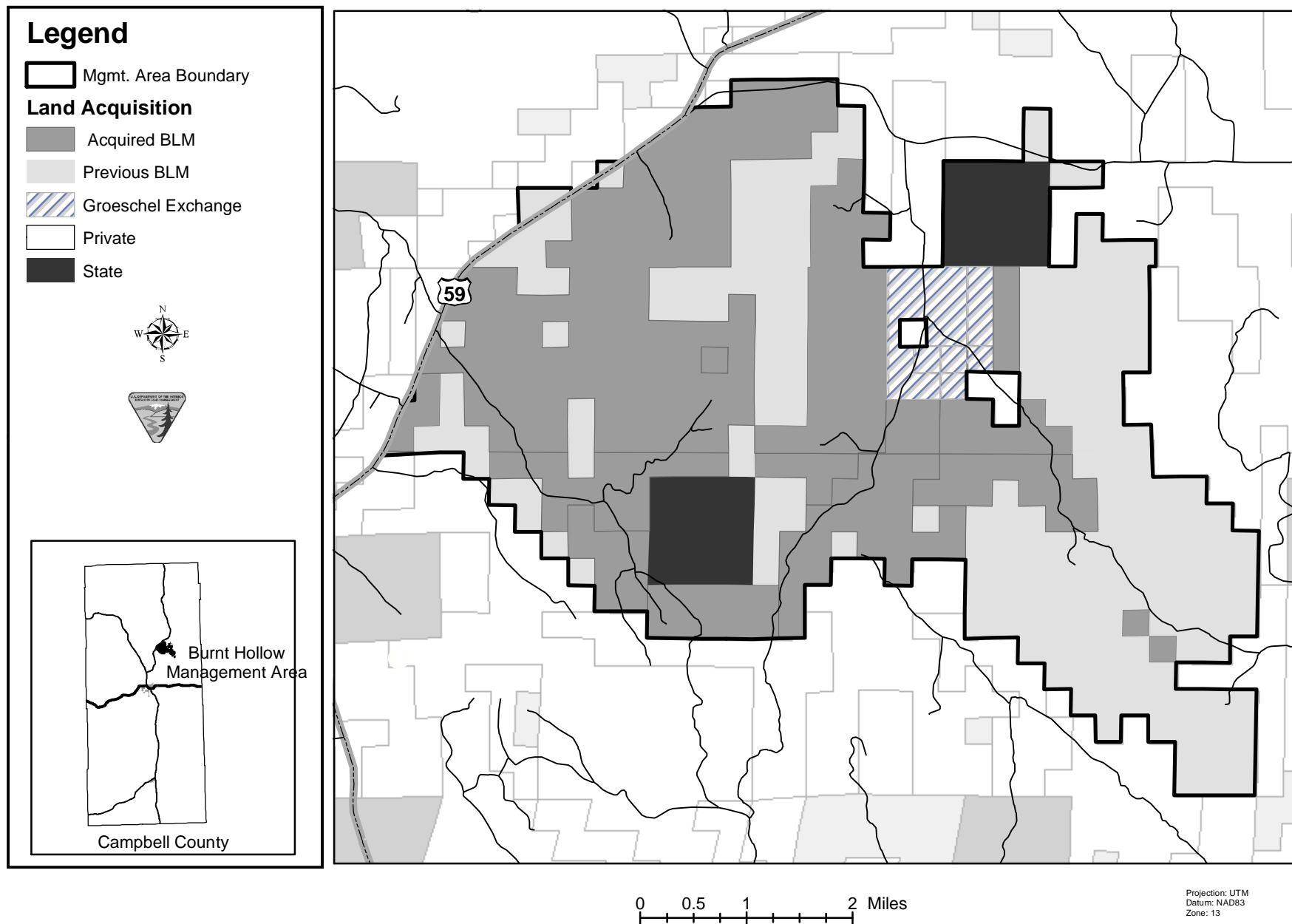
To promote ecological and natural integrity, BLM prefers to manage similar, contiguous land areas (i.e. watersheds) as single units. Therefore, although the land exchange involved primarily one grazing lessee within one allotment (60 Bar), the BHMA contains portions of several BLM allotments. In respect to the other grazing lessees, proposed trailheads and other facilities remain to the extent practical within the boundaries of the 60 Bar allotment. Grazing management as discussed in this document, pertains only to the 60 Bar allotment. For the other grazing allotments, compatibility with the Burnt Hollow Management Plan shall be one of the factors analyzed during lease renewal.

The lands and realty management objective stated in the BFO Resources Management Plan (RMP) (BLM 2001) is to:

“Avoid the potential of inadvertent trespass by people accessing the public lands, and to improve access and manageability of the public lands.”

Priority for lands to be acquired is given to those lands that can provide access to large blocks of public lands or to public land with unique resources. Lands with high scenic value, or contain

Figure 1.1 Existing and Acquired Public Lands Comprising the Burnt Hollow Management Area, Campbell County, Wyoming.



water, or those that provide wildlife habitat are desirable. Blocked land and access is also desirable if accessible to communities such as Gillette.

The acquired lands meet all these criteria. As stated above the exchange provides public access to a block of approximately 18,416 acres. The varied topography and diversity of vegetation communities is unique and provide habitat for numerous wildlife species including trophy class mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). A few of the ephemeral drainages support ecologically important cottonwood (*Populus* spp.) riparian communities. Finally, the area is accessible to Gillette, 16 miles to the south on Wyoming Highway 59.

To protect these resources and fulfill the lands and realty management objective, a management plan needs be prepared for the acquired lands and the previously inaccessible BLM lands. This Environmental Assessment will identify the issues previously raised by the public, describe the proposed management plan, describe alternatives to the proposed management plan, describe the environmental resources affected, and disclose the effects of the proposed management on the environmental resources.

### **1.1 Conformance with Land Use Plan**

Development of a resources management plan for public lands is subject to and consistent with the Buffalo Field Office Resources Management Plan (BLM 2001). Conformance with the RMP's land and realty management objective was discussed above.

### **1.2 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans**

This environmental assessment was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and other statutes relevant to the proposal.

Authority for the proposed action and alternatives is contained in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended (FLPMA) and the regulations in 43 CFR 2200. Section 102(a)(8) of FLPMA states:

“the public lands be managed in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archeological values; that, where appropriate, will preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition; that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals; and that will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use;”

### **1.3 Permits, licenses, and other entitlements necessary for implementation**

Many of the projects proposed in this management plan will require permits, licenses, or other entitlements. All necessary documents will be acquired before a project is implemented.